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SUBJECT: FADILA BLOC MEMBER DR. BASIM SHARIF ON THE COR, PM MALIKI, AND THE SADRISTS.

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a frank conversation held at the al-Rasheed Hotel in Baghdad, COR and Fadila bloc member Dr. Basim Sharif al-Hechaimi discussed the recent Iraqi military operation in Basra. Decrying what he considered a unilateral act on the part of the PM, Dr. Basim highlighted the recent action as further proof that "the PM is moving away from democracy to dictatorship." He also stated that the Council of Representatives (COR) has become one of the casualties of the PM's recent adventure, positing that the COR has not only become weaker, but that it has also become extremely polarized. Asked whether Fadila would join the Sadrists if they pursue a no-confidence vote against the PM, Dr. Basim remained noncommittal. Commenting on relations between the PM and the Sadrists, Dr. Basim stated that the Sadrists believe that the PM is trying to destroy the movement, and is no longer making any distinction between the Sadr Trend, JAM, and the rogue Special Groups. He also indicated that many Sadrists viewed the restraint shown by Coalition Forces during the recent hostilities as "very positive," and that there are a number of Sadr Trend leaders who would like to enter into dialogue with the United States. End summary.

¶2. (C) Vociferous in his criticism of the PM's recent military operation, Dr. Basim said that many members of the COR were taken aback by the PM's unilateral action, having never been consulted about his plans or intentions. He added that this was yet another example of the PM ignoring the democratic institutions of the state. Though he did not explicitly state that Fadila would support a no-confidence vote against Maliki, he could not refrain from reiterating his party's antipathy towards the current government, while assuring Poloff that Fadila still supports the GOI. He also stated that if the PM embarked on a plan of national reconciliation, Fadila would wholeheartedly support him, but quickly added that Fadila does not believe the PM would ever do this. When pressed again whether Fadila would line up with the Sadrists behind a no-confidence vote, Dr. Basim instead named other blocs within the COR who he believes may support a no-confidence vote, including Tawafuq, Iraqiyya, and the Kurds, though he appeared less than certain that any of these groups would join, even if a vote were to go forward.

¶3. (C) In an interesting commentary, Dr. Basim stated that the COR has become one of the casualties of the PM's recent action. In Dr. Basim's estimation, the PM's military operation illustrates his desire to acquire more power and marginalize the other institutions of the state, particularly the COR. In addition, he lamented that the COR has become extremely fragmented and polarized. At a time when it needs to focus on significant legislation, it is now riven by internal squabbles, and now no longer resembles a parliament but instead a collection of parties and blocs. He appeared extremely concerned that significant legislation may languish in the COR if the various blocs within the institution do not

put the brakes on their internal quarrels.

¶4. (C) Regarding the recent conflict, Dr. Basim said that many Sadrists now believe that the PM is trying to destroy the movement, and is no longer making any distinction between the Sadr Trend, JAM, and the rogue Special Groups. To him, there is a genuine fear among the Sadrists that the PM will continue anti-Sadrism operations, and that his primary motive is a desire to weaken the Sadrists prior to the upcoming elections, hinting that ISCI is pushing the PM to do this. On an interesting note, Dr. Basim said that the Sadrists viewed America's restraint during the current crisis as "very positive," and were pleased that the U.S. had not acted with a "heavy hand." He also revealed that there are an increasing number of Sadr Trend leaders who would like to enter into dialogue with the United States, and offered Fadila's assistance in facilitating any such dialogue.

¶5. (C) Comment: Our soundings of other political figures, including leaders of Iraqiya and Tawafuq, indicate that for now there is a "rally around the PM" effect taking, with the Sadrists and Fadila somewhat isolated. However, in Iraq's fluid political environment, backing for the PM can wax or wane quickly. Although Dr. Basim did not address directly Fadila's views on the future of Basra, we will continue to watch whether as a result of this week's events Fadila evinces an even stronger interest in transforming Basrah into a region, a project that might well spark a separate political crisis down the road. End Comment.

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